

INTRODUCTION

There is a long history of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, with some families now having been here since the time that the first British Battalion landed in Hong Kong. Indeed, Sikh and Indian members of the British army witnessed the proclamation ceremony at Possession Point where the British flag was hoisted in 1841.¹ As members of the British armed forces first and later, as merchants and businessmen who came to be part of Hong Kong's vibrant entrepot. Collectively, they boast contributions including the founding of the first university in the territory as well as the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation and the Star Ferry.

When advocates have raised questions about the possibility that Hong Kong is falling foul of its obligations under the Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the government confidently says 'No.' As for the incidents we hear about, these are explained away as 'one-off' instances of cultural difference, miscommunication or misfortune. However, after decades of raising awareness about Hong Kong's entrenched racism, it is time for numbers and evidence to speak to the issue. Perhaps this will improve communication between communities and help everyone better understand where ethnic minorities stand relative to the Hong Kong population as a whole.

The government has taken a largely education-oriented approach towards addressing discrimination focusing its efforts on the need to eliminate cultural misunderstandings through celebrating cultural festivals or those aspects of our identities which are 'exoticised'. However, recent examples of discrimination give pause for thought for their shock value. How can an Indian woman have lost her life as a result of unequal treatment on the basis of her darker skin colour in a Hong Kong hospital? How can a Pakistani man whose great uncle served in the army to fight the Japanese occupation and whose family has been in Hong Kong for one hundred years be ineligible to naturalise as a Chinese despite his roots and perfect Cantonese diction?

Having been here since the establishment of the territory, many ethnic minorities feel a deep-rooted connection with Hong Kong and it is their home as it has been for generations. Over the decades, we have witnessed a continuous rise in the number of ethnic minorities living in Hong Kong. Some come here to unite with their families, whilst others come here to work and end up making it their home. Despite this growth in numbers, however, Hong Kong falls far short of the standards that would be expected of 'Asia's World City' given that it thrives on this very cosmopolitanism and richness of diversity.

For some reason, over the years, there has been a misperception that Hong Kong's ethnic minority population is a 'transient' population; that as a group, they are amorphous and liable to change depending on their social, economic or other personal circumstances. This misconceived notion seems to underscore the nature of policymaking pertaining to minority groups in Hong Kong. Whilst resources are routinely and abundantly allocated to ensure adequate provisions are made for education, health, social welfare, employment and family in relation to the society as a whole, there are piecemeal approaches to 'adding on' extra measures to these with a view to looking after the needs of 'special groups.'

Unfortunately, such an approach does not work. Time and again, there have been numerous examples of instances where the system has failed minorities, first in terms of refusing to recognize the extent to which they suffer inequality and discrimination in the

community and now, in terms of failing to understand the ways in which there is a systemic mismatch between their needs and the measures that are currently in place to meet their basic human rights.

In light of their historical roots here, their service to Hong Kong during the Japanese Occupation, and their continued contribution to society, it is only apt that we seek to better understand ethnic minorities and their needs and more importantly, collate in one place the evidence that belies the systemic, structural and entrenched nature of the failure to deliver on the promise of equality and respect for the equal worth and dignity of all people regardless of race, colour, and ethnicity.

The objective of this Report therefore is to identify the existing research material pertaining to ethnic minorities in Hong Kong from after the handover until 2014 and to compile, interpret and analyse the research with a view to developing a broad picture of the situation of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong in key areas of life. The Report seeks to understand the background, opportunities for development, enrichment, education and employment and social, health and family life provisions in relation to the ethnic minorities of Hong Kong. It is hoped that this exercise will lead to the emergence of core priority areas for further research, advocacy and policymaking driven by evidence. In one sense, this Report sets the ball rolling and it is hoped that others will pick up where this Report leaves off, to fill in the gaps and continue the mapping exercise to build a comprehensive picture of the status of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong.

As the demographic constitution of a community changes, it is necessary to take stock of the changes and assess the ways in which the needs and potential of this community to contribute to Hong Kong has altered as well. However, this does not appear to have been done in the case of Hong Kong's ethnic minority population. There is scant data whereas their key demographic data which has been put together by the Census and Statistics Department in the form of a Thematic Report on Ethnic Minorities is not collated in a manner that is necessarily most conducive to determining the most accurate data points for effective and targeted policymaking.

For example, the ways in which the population is categorized as a whole as well as the sub-groupings do not fully or adequately reflect understandings representations of ethnic minority identities today nor do they befit the manner in which these groups would themselves like to be recognized. The material available therefore, unhelpful in forming conclusive views about specific groups and cannot lead to particularized understandings of ethnic minority needs and the priority areas for policymaking in relation to them. Sometimes, wholly inappropriate and irrelevant terms are used to describe groups and causes confusion in reading and understanding the data.

A similar information deficit appears to plague others in the community, who have sought to work with or learn more about ethnic groups in Hong Kong and attitudes towards them. For example, the use of terms such as 'Arabian' in one piece of research illustrates the need for greater scrutiny not only of the policies that However, they have failed to recognize that within the category of 'ethnic minorities', the government includes groups with vast differences including Whites and foreign domestic helpers. More recently, the government has conflated the issues relating to ethnic minorities in the context of education by coining the term 'non-Chinese speaking students' or 'NCS students' to describe those who cannot speak Cantonese, regardless of their ethnicity. Necessarily, the needs of NCS children who ethnic Chinese will differ from the needs of NCS non-ethnic Chinese students due to the

differences in exposure to the Cantonese language depending on their respective home environments and social communities.

In light of this there is an urgent need to reexamine the use of terms such as ethnic minority, which carries certain political connotations (some of these are negative) in light of the global discourse on minorities and diversity management and nation building. On the other hand, the term is non-specific and therefore, unhelpful as a term to understand particular groups' demography, which may be individually significant but when brought under this umbrella heading, its significance is lost. To be described as a minority is burdensome and disempowering. It is time that we chart a new discourse for Hong Kongers who are its coloured community. And it is essential that ethnic minorities participate in this discourse on how they wish to be referred to in the context of Hong Kong.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach to this Report involved conducting a thorough literature review of all existing research pertaining to minorities in what we have identified as 'core life areas', including, legal protection, key demographic data, perceptions of ethnic minorities, language, identity, integration and belonging, education, employment, poverty and social welfare, health and crime and law enforcement. The period for the survey of literature review was all work since the handover in 1997 to 2014. In some instances, 2015 literature has been included because of its salience or indispensability to the broader arguments and themes emerging from this Report.

The literature has been compared with and supplemented by available statistical data as obtained through the Census and Statistics Department's (CSD) Reports and its online interactive data service. Although attempts were made at using the CSD's self-tabulation workstations and service, in the end, the data to be disaggregated by several variables produced too few numbers to be permissible to extract into tables as this would be in violation of privacy policies.

The literature and data was then analysed and interpreted to identify the core areas which warrant urgent attention in light of the findings. These formed the basis of the key observations pertaining to each of the areas covered by the chapters of this Report. Drawing on these, focused recommendations were formulated for each Chapter to identify critical aspects needing urgent attention. It is hoped that these recommendations, including the broader areas of attention outlined in the Key Recommendations Chapter will provide useful food for thought for those working in the respective areas in general as teachers, doctors, social workers, employers and also, those whose work routinely involves interaction with or concerns ethnic minorities.

Despite efforts having been made at being thorough, it is invariably anticipated that there are other research work that has been carried out and relevant to this Report. Authors of such reports and outputs are encouraged to write to the author of this Report and to identify such resources to facilitate the development of a repository of research material pertaining to ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. Furthermore, where there is no data on particular aspects, this has been identified as a data gap. Funders, government bureaus, non-governmental organisations and researchers are invited to identify areas of interest in this data gap and to pursue such further research so that increasingly, policymaking and

the development of approaches to diversity management in Hong Kong become evidence-based.

Terminology

This Report is interested in looking at the reasons behind the comparatively poorer life experiences in a range of areas between different groups of Hong Kong residents. As such, although the term ‘ethnic minorities’ would ordinarily refer to the full range of persons residing in Hong Kong, the Report distinguishes between different groups. This is done to highlight that even the longer-term resident ethnic minority groups face barriers and difficulties in everyday life. That being a Hong Konger does not in and of itself entitle you to all the benefits that one would consider to be equally available to all persons resident in the territory without distinctions as to race, colour, ethnicity, religion, culture, etc..

At the same time however, there are some ethnic groups who fare better than others in terms of access to opportunities and services in Hong Kong. This Report concerns itself with identifying how the groups compare in terms of their treatment, experience, and opportunity of access for upward social mobility through education, employment, etc..

Despite the problems identified with the term ‘ethnic minorities’, this Report does use it because it has come to acquire a meaning of reference to those who are non-ethnic Chinese in Hong Kong. However, for the reasons aforementioned, given that there are diverse experiences that characterize the life of all those who fall under this broad umbrella term ‘ethnic minorities’, to focus attention on the groups who are perceived as experiencing challenges in various aspects of life, this Report intentionally only includes discussion of South and East Asian minorities where relevant. As such, the term, as used in this report, does not purport to cover the situation of the category ‘White’, although they fall within the definition of this term as it is presently used in official parlance.

The second group that is not covered by the use of this term are foreign domestic helpers (FDHs). Their presence and experiences in Hong Kong warrant a focused study of its own given the unique circumstances pertaining to their situation. There are no doubt, overlapping areas of concern, particularly with respect to equality, non discrimination, health and family life. However, this Report does not cover the situation of FDHs although it does address the Filipina and Indonesian population otherwise resident in Hong Kong.

In the context of Hong Kong, the term ‘ethnic Chinese’ is unhelpful to use in contradistinction to the term ‘ethnic minorities’ because Hong Kong has received and continues to receive a large number of ethnic Chinese settling in through the one-way permit scheme operative between Hong Kong and China. As such, the term ‘Hong Kong Chinese’ is used to define the ethnic Chinese population who are considered Hong Kong’s ‘non-immigrant’ and therefore, ‘permanent’ population group.

Some of the reports produced by the CSD use ‘country of origin’ or ‘nationality’ to collect data or maintain statistics. This term, however, is too broad and vague to account for Hong Kong’s ethnic minorities especially since they may be born in another country but reside in Hong Kong since birth or soon after, having no other connection with their ‘country of origin’. Alternatively, they may wish to acquire Chinese nationality but are unable to do so and their birth nationality has little to do with how they identify.

In light of the difficulties the existing terms of usage are fraught with, the Government should also carefully reconsider and standardize terms of usage across its different data collection and reporting bodies (including the police, social welfare, labour, health and

other departments and bureaus) so that the terms are specific, accurate and consistently used. This would assist greatly in ensuring enhanced specificity to capture the distinct positions of different groups, including new migrants and Hong Kong permanent resident non-ethnic Chinese.

The research presented in this Report is drawn from existing data and research material that is publicly available. In some circumstances, the data pertains to ethnic minority groups more broadly and includes data of groups in addition to those that have been identified as the focus for this Report. In some areas, where limited data disaggregated by ethnicity is available, the data referenced is provided to offer a general impression and should be viewed with this important caveat in mind. It may, in such instances, be unreliable to draw generalised conclusions from the limited data. However, it has been included to highlight that more specific data disaggregated by ethnicity, gender, age and other variables is desirable to facilitate policy development and focused interventions. These are data gaps that we recognise and have identified through this report. We encourage the government and other researchers to identify additional data gaps and supplement with research of their own.

¹ Kwok S. T., Narain, K. (2003). *Co-Prosperity in Cross-Culturalism: Indians in Hong Kong*. p.18.